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# Understanding Research Fatigue in the Context of Community-University Relations

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UNDERSTANDING RESEARCH FATIGUE IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY-  
UNIVERSITY RELATIONSHIPS

ELORA WAY

OCTOBER 2013

A MASTER'S RESEARCH PAPER

Submitted to the faculty of Clark University, Worcester,  
Massachusetts, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts in the department of Community Development and Planning

And accepted on the recommendation of

Dr. Laurie Ross, Chief Instructor

## ABSTRACT

## Understanding Research Fatigue in the Context of Community-University Relationships

Elora Way

Community research fatigue has been understudied within the context of community-university relationships and knowledge production. Community-based research (CBR), often occurring within a limited geography and population, increases the possibility that community members feel exhausted or over-whelmed by university research —particularly when they do not see tangible results from research activities. Prompted by informal stories of research fatigue from community members, a small graduate student team sought to understand the extent to which community members experienced research fatigue, and what factors contributed to or relieved feelings of research fatigue. In order to explore these dimensions of research fatigue, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 21 participants, including community members ( $n = 9$ ), staff and faculty ( $n = 10$ ), and students ( $n = 2$ ). The objective of the research was to identify university practices that contribute to research fatigue and how to address the issue at the university level. Qualitative data analysis revealed several important actionable findings: the structure and conduct of community-based research, structured reciprocity and impact, and the role of trust in research. This study's findings are used to assess the quality of Clark University's research relationship with its adjacent community. Recommendations are offered; such as to improve partnerships, the impact of CBR, and to develop clear principles of practice.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“I am interviewed over and over and over and nothing has ever changed.”*

*- June, Community Member*

This one sentence, uttered by a community member in a conversation with my colleague, sparked a two-year research endeavor and a turning point in my academic career. Though her words came as a shock, they were not a surprise. Throughout my own experience as a student in higher education, I had taken several community-based learning courses. In those courses I witnessed many service-learning and community-based research projects fail to impact the community-based organizations they were meant to help.

I had a hunch June was not the only community member who felt this way so I decided to investigate the dynamic further. That was when I came across the term research fatigue. Research fatigue is the process or state in which individuals or groups tire of engaging in research or resist and avoid participation in any further research (Clark, 2008). Such fatigue typically occurs with projects that require participation over time or with groups of people who are continually engaged in research, such as in areas where research groups are limited or research is conducted in high volumes. Since both these situations frequently arise in university-led community-based research, I was baffled that such a concept had been neglected in my schooling. In response to the lack of knowledge of community research fatigue, I set out to understand how community members experienced research fatigue and what factors contributed to or relieved these feelings of fatigue. Also, in an attempt to prove to myself, and June, that research could lead to change, I began the

project with an action-based research framework. For this reason, my main research objective was to identify university practices that contribute to research fatigue and how to address the issue at the university level.

The site of this case study is Clark University and the neighborhood that surrounds its campus, known as Main South, in Worcester, Massachusetts. Though Clark is a small liberal arts-based university it places a strong emphasis on undergraduate research and community engagement, and community-based research projects are common (Clark University, 2012a). The university is also situated in a particularly blighted area of Worcester and Clark has been involved in community-university partnerships and initiatives to improve the area since the mid 1980s.

This paper reviews current literature on research fatigue. In order to frame an investigation of community research fatigue, I synthesized the literature on community-university relationships and community-based research. I conducted face-to-face interviews with members of both the Main South community and the university. Qualitative data analysis revealed several problematic areas: the current structure and conduct of community research, a lack of reciprocity and community impact, and compromised trust. Using this study's findings, I analyzed the overall quality of the research relationship between the community and university. The analysis points to key recommendations designed to shift the current academic culture from an extractive understanding of the community to one where community residents and community-based organizations (CBO) are treated as equal partners in the knowledge production process.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### **Research fatigue**

Participation in research is almost always voluntary: people must choose to engage. Several scholars, however, have also acknowledged that there are few compelling reasons to engage and participants are rarely presented with economic incentives (Clark, 2008, 2010; Maanen, 1991). Yet researchers continue to be surprised by the extent to which participants are willing to disclose personal information and offer their valuable time. In fact, investigations of why people engage in research have found participants and gatekeepers actively negotiate their own interests and goals within the research context and thus perceive some benefit from engaging (Clark, 2010). Participants have been found to engage in research for a complex array of reasons such as self-expression, catharsis, altruism, activism, enjoyment, curiosity, community good, a material/economic interest, a hope to inform change, and the chance to share opinions or experiences with a sympathetic listener (Bosworth, Campbell, Demby, Ferranti, & Santos, 2005; Cassell, 1978; Clark, 2010; Fry & Dwyer, 2001; Peel, Parry, Douglas, & Lawton, 2006; Tarpey, 2006; Warwick, 1982). It is important to note that participants, particularly first time participants, *anticipate* some sort of benefit from engaging but as Clark (2008) found participant's experiences of an earlier engagement can act as a barrier to future involvement.

The willingness of people to engage in research, though, cannot be taken for granted. It is perhaps for this reason that some scholars have emphasized the need for reciprocity within research relationships (Clark, 2010). It is also widely accepted that trust, credibility, and rapport are central mechanisms that support engagement (*ibid*). Similarly,

ethical risk management, such as though an Institutional Review Board, has been put into place to help avoid negative outcomes for participants (Birch, Jessop, Mauthner, & Miller, 2002). There is, however, a crucial difference between acquiring the first engagement and sustaining engagement over time: the crux of research fatigue.

Though the phenomenon of research fatigue is under-studied, within the current body of literature, findings can be broken into three common themes that either positively or negatively affect participants' willingness to engage in further research: alignment of interest and/or mutual benefit (Clark, 2008, 2011; Emmel, Hughes, Greenhalgh, & Sales, 2007); lack of perceived impact attributable to engagement (Clark, 2008); and exploitation and distrust (Armitage, 2008; Braithwaite, Cockwill, O'Neill, & Rebane, 2007; Clapham, Khavarpour, & Stevenson, 2006; Höglund, 2011; Moore, 1996). These categories are, of course, not discrete, can be mutually reinforcing, and share many common factors such as power (Gaventa, 1993), trust (Emmel, et al., 2007), representation (Bosworth, et al., 2005; Braithwaite, et al., 2007; Moore, 1996), and reciprocity (Clark, 2008; Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010; Emmel, et al., 2007; Weerts, 2005).

#### *Alignment of interest and/or mutual benefit*

Clark (2008) found fatigue can occur if people are simply not interested in parts or all of the research project, particularly if the project is not relevant. If there is little interest in the topic from the start, any engagement that has been initiated will be difficult to maintain. This can be particularly true of gatekeepers – individuals, groups, or organizations that act as intermediaries between researchers and participants, such as staff of community-based organizations (CBO) or social workers (Clark, 2011; Emmel, et al.,

2007). Similar in character to a lack of interest, a lack of mutual benefit and structured reciprocity can be a barrier to first engagement as well as continued engagement. Emmel et al. (2007) in their research on accessing socially excluded groups of people found trust was supported and maintained through acts of reciprocity. They explain that even if change as a result of involvement cannot be offered to a research group some type of reciprocal agreement should be arranged (e.g. ESL classes, access to universities resources/services, etc) (*ibid*). Participants, however, can become particularly disengaged or hostile when there has been a history of researchers who make promises of reciprocity but do not follow through as expected (Armitage, 2008; Braithwaite, et al., 2007; Clapham, et al., 2006; Höglund, 2011; Moore, 1996; Tomlinson, Swartz, & Landman, 2006). Similarly, promises of mutual benefit are often wrapped up in the impact of research (addressed in the next section) which further complicates the issue of research fatigue.

#### *Lack of perceived impact*

Clark (2008) found that a frequently cited explanation used by researchers to account for research fatigue is the lack of change that is attributable to previous engagements. When research participants do not perceive that their prior involvement in research had an impact on their own circumstances or a wider population they are less likely to participate in subsequent projects (*ibid*). The experience of fatigue is particularly severe for people who engage with the expectation of impact and are disappointed or even alienated by the process when no discernible change is experienced (*ibid*). Unfortunately, ‘change’ is rarely the inevitable outcome of research engagement.

### *Exploitation and distrust*

There are many instances throughout qualitative research where communities treat outsiders with suspicion, hostility, or distrust (Armitage, 2008; Braithwaite, et al., 2007; Clapham, et al., 2006; Höglund, 2011; Moore, 1996). Often the communities' wariness is a result of many levels and years of misrepresentation, knowledge extraction, or neglected promises (Armitage, 2008; Braithwaite, et al., 2007; Clapham, et al., 2006; Höglund, 2011; Moore, 1996; Tomlinson, et al., 2006). Below is a sampling from several studies and research projects.

Tomlinson et al. (2006) and Höglund (2011) independently noted how South Africans were almost loathsome of researchers, especially outsiders who fly in for short periods of time to conduct "parachute research:" collecting only the data they need and leaving without returning anything to the community they studied or South African society. In Australia, Aboriginal communities have been similarly exhausted by decades of research and development projects (Australian College of Educators, 2006; Clapham, et al., 2006). Even in a public health intervention designed to have aboriginal leadership, indigenous researchers were not immune to the community's distrust of research when the community still had yet to experience positive outcomes from decades of studies (Clapham et al., 2006). In the United States, Native American communities have been studied in greater detail than any other ethnic group in the U.S. yet their communities are consistently some of the most blighted in the country (Brugge & Missaghian, 2006). In addition to the failure of outside research to create social change in Native communities, one Native American explains some of the material consequences of the knowledge double standard:

The researcher has the luxury of studying the community as an object of science, whereas the young Indian, who knows the nuances of tribal life, receives nothing in the way of compensation or recognition for his knowledge, and instead must continue to do jobs, often manual labor, that have considerably less prestige. If knowledge of the Indian community is so valuable, how can non-Indians receive so much compensation for their small knowledge and Indians receive so little for their extensive knowledge? (*ibid*: 493)

Consequently, several Native tribes have chosen to push back on outside researchers either through variations of Community Review Boards that vet outside research or by independently designing and conducting research within their communities (*ibid*).

### **Community-based research**

Interestingly, community-based research (CBR), as a theory and research model, partially evolved in response to similar examples of exploitation, misrepresentation, poor impact and exclusion that can be common aspects of the research process (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Minkler, 2005; Stoecker, 2003; Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003; Wallerstein & Duran, 2008). In general, there are two perspectives that have influenced CBR, one of its roots can be traced back to the action research school associated with social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1948). CBR's other influence comes from a more revolutionary approach to research, called participatory research, that emerged from work in oppressed communities in South America, Asia, and Africa in the 1970s (Freire, 1987; Hall, 1992). These scholars, and many after them, exposed how knowledge under the control of a few oppresses the masses (Gaventa, 1993; Stoecker, 2003; Strand, et al., 2003). In response they sought to establish more participatory methods of inquiry that nurtured non-Western, non-positivist notions of science and democratic knowledge production.

On campuses, CBR has grown out of community-university partnerships and unites three traditional academic missions; teaching, research, and service. There are three general principles of CBR: (1) the research is collaborative, (2) it privileges multiple forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, and (3) its goal is social action and change (Stoecker, 2003). However, Stoecker (2003) also explains that each of these three components can be interpreted in radical or conservative ways. For example, a radical understanding of “collaboration” would mean that researchers and community members would play an equal part in defining the research question, choosing the research methods, conducting and analyzing the research, and using the research for social change (*ibid*). A conservative interpretation might define the community as service organizations rather than residents and collaboration would consist of garnering approval for a university-defined research project (*ibid*).

In a later piece by Stoecker (2007), he addresses how not only are there conservative or radical interpretations of CBR but with the widespread use of the term its definition becomes more and more dilute. As Stoecker explains, CBR has “come to include everything from research that is controlled by the community to research that is simply located in a community” (2007:1). In this paper I use the term community-based research (CBR) knowing that it encompasses a continuum of community research but I will clarify the interpretation of a given CBR model where necessary (see Figure 1).





**Figure 1.** This figure illustrates the continuum between radical and conservative interpretations of community-based research.

## Community-university relationships

Relationships are a central, defining dimension of community-campus engagement and research that uses human participants (Dorado & Giles, 2004; Jacoby, 2003; Strand, et al., 2003). Since community-based research encompasses both community-campus engagement and qualitative research, there are many types and levels of relationships at play in the CBR process. There is the overarching relationship between a community and a university, which is broadly defined and established by many other relationships. Next, there are the relationships between offices or departments and specific organizations and businesses. Finally, there are the individual research and personal interactions and/or relationships that develop among administrators, faculty, students, community-based organization (CBO) staff, and community residents who are engaged in the research

process. Bodies of literature discussing community-university relationships (Clayton, et al., 2010; Weerts, 2005) and qualitative research relationships (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007) have identified trust, rapport, and credibility as factors that are essential to foster quality relationships. When conducting community-based research, however, a researcher must not only establish a trusting relationship with participants but also simultaneously account for the many other relationships that may positively or negatively affect his/her ability to conduct research. Thus, for community-based research to produce relevant research and not exhaust participants there must be some amount of coordination and consistency among the various levels of relationships.

The need for management and a means to build trust in community-based research is why many scholars and practitioners of CBR consider mutually beneficial campus-community partnerships to be the “bedrock” of successful CBR (Israel et al., 2006; Israel et al., 2008; Minkler, 2005; Strand, et al., 2003). However, they are also the first to admit that creating and sustaining community-based research partnerships that are equal, collaborative, impactful, and long-lasting is not an easy task (Strand et al., 2003). Strand et al. (2003) outline several shared principles that enable a community-university partnership to be successful, however, their framework is limited in its ability to assess the quality and reciprocity of individual relationships, such as those among administrators, faculty, students, CBO staff, and community residents.

Clayton et al. (2010) developed a framework that is meant to establish clearer nomenclature and a means to delineate the nature and quality of relationships in civic engagement. Their conceptual tool is also useful in the assessment a wide array of research

relationships – individual or organizational. The framework, which is adapted from Enos & Morton (2003) and Burns (1978), differentiates relationships as exploitative, transactional, or transformational. A relationship that intentionally or unintentionally takes advantage of or harms one or both parties is defined as exploitative. Within civic engagement, an exploitative relationship might be when a university uses engagement merely as a public relations ploy to attract prospective students and funding (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009). A transactional relationship is designed to complete short-term tasks. Each party benefits from the exchange but the relationship is only seen as instrumental with no long-term scope. A transformational relationship strives beyond mutual benefit to create a space where all parties grow and become immersed in the process of deeper, sustained change. Critical reflection is used to explore new possibilities, revisit and revise goals and identities, and advance systems that challenge hegemonic structures and processes. Clayton et al.'s relationship evaluation framework is not meant to be conclusive, but will be used, along with insights from CBR theories, as a heuristic device to explore how the quality of community-university relationships within and outside of research might influence the experience of research fatigue.

Anecdotal accounts and formal investigations of research fatigue have laid necessary groundwork on which to activate our understanding of the phenomenon. Anecdotal accounts, however, only give us brief, disjointed insights regarding research fatigue. Formal investigations so far have only interviewed researchers, not research participants, about the roots and impacts of research fatigue. Since research participants are

undoubtedly the ones who directly experience research fatigue, it is key that they are brought into the dialogue. Within this paper I attempt to address two gaps in the current literature. First, the opinions and insights of people who are consistently approached to contribute to university research will be systematically analyzed. Since the focus of this research was ultimately on how to reduce community research fatigue the thoughts of university staff and faculty are also incorporated for their insider perspective on university structures and processes. Second, the implications of community research fatigue will be discussed within the context of community-university relationships and knowledge production. Recommendations are offered.

## BACKGROUND

### **Project team**

This research was borne out of a yearlong course I began my senior year as an undergraduate. Though only my name is on this paper, the research began as group effort. Three of my classmates and I were strongly attracted to the relevance of the project and the prospect of holding our university accountable as a responsible community partner. Together we developed our initial research questions, methodology, and conducted interviews with 21 participants. Thus, moving forward in the paper, when I use first person plural pronouns such as, *our*, *we*, and *us* I am referring to the research team in total and the actions and decisions we made during the initial research process. After our yearlong project was complete and we had given our final paper to our professor and participants, I chose to continue the research process. Because we chose an action research framework, I

felt it was necessary to conduct a deeper analysis of the data and continue to share and use my findings to inform change at the university.

### **Clark University**

Clark University is a small, urban, liberal-arts-based research university. Approximately 65% of undergraduate students participate in research (Clark University, 2012a). Many introductory research methods courses are practice-based which allows students to apply research skills early in their undergraduate careers. The university similarly emphasizes the liberal notion of community engagement to provide students with “real-world” experiences and inspire global citizenship. Every semester a number of service-learning courses are offered and year-round volunteer opportunities are available. Clark is also part of the Campus Compact, a national coalition of over 1,200 campus presidents’ who are committed to fulfilling higher education’s civic responsibility (Campus Compact, 2012).

A commitment to civic engagement has always been a part of the university’s mission. When founded, Jonas Clark established the school “in and for” the Worcester community (Bowman, 2011). In the early 20th century, Clark established its first undergraduate college. The program, however, was a condensed three-year program that sought to widen access to higher education for local students who could not afford most New England colleges (Bowman, 2011). The college was particular in its approach; it supported “practical and useful educational values that would fit students for citizenship as opposed to the traditional American college with its emphasis on bookish form of culture” (William Koelsch in Bowman, 2011, p.46).

*Liberal Education and Effective Practice*

Today, Jonas Clark's original ideal of preparing students for citizenship is being engaged again by Clark's new Liberal Education and Effective Practice (LEEP) initiative. LEEP has a number of learning outcomes it hopes to develop within Clark students. The one that is most relevant to this discussion is *Personal and Social Responsibility* which involves "intercultural understanding and competence to participate in a global society [and] civic knowledge and engagement locally as well as globally" (Clark University, 2012a). The LEEP webpage continues to explain that "these abilities will be anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges, taking particular advantage of Clark's urban location and global connections" (*ibid*).

This is not the first time Clark's location in an economically depressed urban area has been regarded for its ability to offer Clark students an environment to practice and learn. In 1970, a "Report of the President" deliberately encouraged students in geography, sociology, and government to use the local community as "a living laboratory for learning about social organization, class attitudes, ethnic politics and the structure of power in the community" (Bowman 2004:49). Though the notion of using communities as laboratories for academic ends has been problematized due to its inherently extractive, exploitative rhetoric, it is a discourse still used by some at Clark University (Clayton, et al., 2010). For example, on the webpage of one graduate department, the community surrounding Clark, Main South, is described as "a living laboratory for our research and teaching" (Clark University, 2012b). It was this tendency on the part of Clark to use the Main South community as a research site that helped spur my initial investigation of research fatigue.

## METHODS OF INQUIRY

### **Methodology**

Qualitative methods were used to investigate this case study, which involved semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, participant observation, and qualitative data analysis. Interviews were conducted at participants' place of work to be considerate of community members' time and obligations. Once we began interviewing though, at Clark and in Main South, these differing spaces offered insights around our participants' power and positionality (Elwood & Martin, 2000). We personally had to grapple with the challenges of negotiating community spaces with our university-determined needs. For example, in one interview conducted by two of my colleagues, the interview was interrupted multiple times because their interviewee had to attend to customers.

My investigation of community research fatigue at Clark did not end once my project team turned in our final paper in May of 2012. Equipped with the findings from the original interviews, I began to immerse myself in an iterative quest to understand the phenomenon of community research fatigue. To this end, I have had numerous conversations regarding the initial findings with staff, faculty, administrators, students, and community members, many of whom were original participants. I have had several opportunities to present my research to the Clark community as well as faculty from other colleges and universities. Finally, in collaboration with a colleague, I planned and hosted a community engagement think tank that brought together a variety of stakeholders from the university and community to discuss the findings and outline better community

engagement practices for the university. I have incorporated much of the feedback and ideas from these dialogues into the findings and discussion.

## **Participants**

We conducted interviews with a total of 21 participants: nine from the community surrounding the university and 12 from within the university. Community members were chosen by their proximity to campus, how often they are frequented by Clark members or the relationship they have with the university, such as through a partnership. Of the participants from the community, five were from businesses, two from neighboring schools, and two from community organizations. Many of the community participants were also residents of the area. Participants from the university included six professors, four staff/administrators, and two students. University participants were selected based on their involvement in community-based research, CBR-based courses, or community-university partnerships.

To identify the first round of prospective interviewees, the research team used a variety of means. In the community, participants were chosen based on our team's prior knowledge of commonly researched topics, community groups, and well-known/frequented establishments. Within the university, we again used our knowledge as well as university website searches to identify staff and faculty involved in community-based learning and/or research. A variety of departments and offices were contacted. After all the initial interviewees were contacted and interviewed we used snowball sampling to identify others from either the community or the university who might be interested in contributing (Noy, 2008).



## **Analysis**

Twelve interviews were recorded and transcribed word for word. We were unable to record nine interviews, which meant that the information collected from these were based on field notes taken during the interviews. All interviews were analyzed using QSR NVivo 9. Using qualitative data analysis, the interviews were first coded for overarching themes (Cope, 2005). Then interviews were coded for subthemes to better synthesize and refine the data.

After coding the data, I determined three areas of analytical interest: the structure and conduct of community research, reciprocity and impact, and trust. The remainder of the article will discuss these issues. In accordance with Clark University's Institutional Review Board, all interview excerpts have been made anonymous where possible and the participants provided with pseudonyms.

## **FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

Before discussing the results of this research I want to first reiterate the initial research questions and objective. I investigated how community members experienced research fatigue and how people at the university were aware of the dynamics of research fatigue. Participants were asked to identify factors that contributed to or relieved feelings of research fatigue. Finally, I sought to identify university practices that contribute to research fatigue and how to address the issue at the university level. As I move through the various problem areas that arose from the interviews I will couch most of the findings in terms of process problems and/or cultural issues at the university that shape the way community-based research is carried out. Other relevant factors such as relationships,

reciprocity, power, impact, and trust will be analyzed in relation to the dynamics of community research fatigue.

### **The structure and etiquette of community-based research**

One of the more salient themes found to contribute to the levels of research fatigue experienced by participants was the structure of research projects and the quality of research etiquette. By structure I mean the term of the research and the circumstances around which the research developed. At Clark University there are several research situations, with differing actors, that occur. For students there are three general models: (1) students conduct research as part of curriculum, (2) students pursue their own independent research while being mentored by a faculty member, and (3) students collaborate or assist in faculty member's scholarship (adapted from Shanahan, 2012). The last model is the least common form of community-based research at Clark. The final type of community research is research conducted by a faculty member that does not involve students. This research may or may not be the result of a partnership or relationship with a community organization. Although there are other circumstances from which community-based research can occur, such as through a research institute or organically from a community organization, these situations do not typically occur at Clark University.

Using these distinctions, the research that community and Clark members described as being the most frustrating and exhausting was short-term, curriculum-based student research. It is important to note, however, that to community members especially, all events where a student comes to them asking questions (whether in an IRB-approved qualitative interview, a survey, or an informal one-to-one) are considered research. In fact,

it is common for community members to mentally lump together all types of student community-engagement (i.e. service-learning projects, volunteering, and community-based research). Knowing that student class projects are the most common type of research community members engage in provides the background to better understand the more detailed grievances participants outlined.

### *Time*

The timeframe in which community research occurs is a central issue within the discussion of research fatigue. Research projects that are designed and implemented in only one semester, 14 weeks, do not allow much room for the delays or setbacks that almost always occur in community-based projects. This constraint also limits the types of projects or methodologies that can feasibly be undertaken. One student felt that the timeframe of her research affected its quality and noticed a difference depending on the length of the project:

I think it is different if you have one year versus one semester to do your research. If you only have two weeks to do your research then you aren't going to be like, 'I'll go hang out with these Bhutanese refugees 5 miles out of the city.' I definitely felt the crunch more in my research methods course than in my thesis [which was a yearlong process].

She implies that if students are expected to deliver within a short period of time, especially for a grade, they are not going to take risks in their research projects; i.e. by working with hard to access populations or addressing a complex issue (Kohn, Nov, 2011). This means that they will tend to overburden the easy to access community members and the quality and relevance of their work might also diminish.

For community members, the time that is sacrificed to participate in research has different values than say university faculty or staff. One Clark staff member captures this imbalance in CBR:

Most shops around here are “Ma and Pa” sort of shops and every minute they are talking to you they’re not working, they aren’t making money. And that’s a hard thing to do. I get paid to do this. And I kid about that but it’s truthful. This is my job, so for me I can do this, but for other people it’s not their job. And students need to be aware of that, I guess.

It is for this reason that a number of community members mentioned they were deliberately prudent and discriminating when choosing what research they would participate in.

#### *Redundant and uncoordinated research*

For many community members, research being conducted in the community by the university is perceived as disorganized and redundant. Year after year business owners/managers and community organization staff are asked similar questions about similar subjects for similar research (and service-learning) projects. This level of repetition can be tedious and exhausting for community members. As one CBO staff member explains, “the first time we engage as community members it is fun but year after year we hear the same things over and over and we get drained.” Another community member was confused about why such repetitive research persists: “businesses don’t change much year to year so why do professors constantly send students to go to the same businesses every time?”

Redundant research is the partial result of some professors sending out new students to complete similar assignments. However, another reason is that until recently,

Clark lacked a consolidated system that students could use to find out what projects (research and service-learning) had already been done to avoid repetition. When participants were asked for recommendations for how to alleviate research fatigue, a central repository for student scholarly output was a common solution given. Today, there is a central database for Clark University designed to gather and organize such artifacts of institutional knowledge, called the Digital Commons, but it is only in its natal stage. For the Digital Commons to be useful and reduce redundant research, however, there also needs to be a university culture around the database that supports its use in the research process and compels students and faculty to add to the Digital Commons' collections. As one passionate staff member explains, the Digital Commons is a "perfect platform for creating a repository of artifacts that represent an institution's scholarly output...but it is not the whole thing." She expands further, "my experience with technology is rarely does it solve a process problem...and frankly we have a bit of a process problem," the problem being an uncoordinated, "free for all" approach to community-based research, whether through a class or independently.

Many community members who receive the bulk of undergraduate research advances told stories of having trouble keeping students and their various research projects straight in a given semester. They also spoke of little to no continuity of research from year to year. Research projects would either repeat unnecessarily or the findings and progress of a research project would be abandoned and not carried through once the semester ended. At the university, there is no oversight or coordination of community-based research. Several research methods courses incorporate practice-based assignments and projects into

their curricula which invariably leads some students to carry out their assignments in the community. Furthermore, these research methods courses are taught differently among departments which yields inconsistencies in the quality of student research as well as cultural sensitivity while in the field. Community members and university participants explained that there needs to be better coordination and/or oversight across the university, among/within departments as well as between semesters to avoid redundant research and regulate how often the same community members or organizations are contacted for research or a project. Establishing a unified system of coordination would also address some of the process problems that the Digital Commons is unable to relieve. It is important to reiterate, though, that without a strong institutional culture that supports these processes, any technical or structural solution will be incomplete.

### *Community research etiquette*

There were an alarming number of complaints from community members and university staff regarding students' research etiquette. Many students are not properly preparing for research in the community. This was apparent to participants when students would ask questions that could be easily found on an organization's website or asked questions that indicated general ignorance about the population and characteristics of the neighborhood. For community members, seeing a student's lack of preparation makes them think he/she is not invested in the research, will likely not value their contribution and consequently they feel far less inclined to participate. One community member explains that he is judicious about the research he chooses to participate in and if the researcher seems unprepared, he will not contribute. He prefers research that is "well-

framed” and “goal-oriented” with clearly stated objectives. Aware that many community members feel similarly, one Clark staff member stresses that “it is better for both students and faculty to be well informed before they bring questions to the neighborhood.”

Another aspect of appropriate research etiquette is to follow up with participants and present the final research product. When asked, community members indicated they either never received the final research product or were given it only a fraction of the time. One participant described this dynamic in community research as “drive by” research, similar to the “parachute researchers” who extract knowledge from developing countries mentioned earlier (Höglund, 2011; Tomlinson, et al., 2006). Following up with participants, especially to hand over the final product of the research they contributed to is an essential part of community-engaged research and a simple way to help maintain trust. However, a discussion of such fundamental gestures appears to be missing in most research methods curricula at the university.

In a similar vein, some community members, mostly community-based organization staff, also described experiences where students were unable to follow through on projects or to produce agreed upon deliverables. One CBO staff member said she found many younger undergraduates “dropped the ball in the last minute” on their group projects. When asked if she thought the students’ level of project stamina was a function of age she explained, “I work with teenagers who I don’t think would do that and so I don’t want to blame it entirely on age. But whatever it is about their project experience, they just don’t have much project experience.” Another likely factor behind the lack of project stamina is the semester time constraint. Project preparation is typically done

in the first half of a semester while project actions and deliverables are completed in the second half around the stress of finals. Undergraduates are then expected to immediately leave the dorms with no spare time to bring closure to their relationships with community partners.

### **Reciprocity and impact**

#### *Mutual benefit*

Though many community members expressed that they did not want their time wasted with tedious interviews and surveys, they also did not want to feel like subjects, only instrumental to generating knowledge for the university. When asked what types of research they like to participate in they described research *relationships*, not interactions. Participants had their best research experiences when engagement continued over time, when their “wants and needs” were accounted for, and when researchers had a vested interest in the project and were committed to understanding the culture and issues of the area. One business owner explained that the most successful research project he participated in was part of a larger political campaign to expand the use of the Clark OneCard, the university’s identification/debit card. Furthermore, he was able to experience tangible results of the research; his business now accepts the Clark OneCard. A teacher from a local public school explained that some teachers feel frustrated by the university research that conducts experiments with their students. She believes, however, that their feelings towards research would improve if they were told “what was happening, how, why, and how the findings could be applied to the everyday classroom” and if the information presented was “direct and easy to understand.”



Another local business owner spoke fondly of a marketing research project she had been engaged in. Though she felt only one of the students was helpful, it was because he cared about learning the culture of her business. He came in every week, took pictures, and interviewed everyone in her family. Later when he designed a website for her, he was able to convey the essence of her family-run business because he took the time to understand it. When she was asked what could be done to improve research and lessen fatigue for community members she outlined, “if there was more communication between Clark and the community, if Clark cared, if students cared, if students knew what they were researching, took time to find issues, came back more than once, and shared the results then I think people would feel a lot less fatigue.” Similar to the shop owner’s recommendations, a Clark faculty member expands on these issues, “I think as long as people feel like they are being taken from with nothing given back then people are going to be frustrated but as long as there is some sense of reciprocity then I think people are open to it and we just need to structure that reciprocity in formal ways.”

Some participants went further when describing ideal research projects; they wanted partnerships. Akin to Clayton et al.’s (2010) description of a transformative community-university partnership, several participants spoke of research relationships immersed in a process of shared knowledge production designed with the intent of mutual benefit and sustained change. A staff member of a local school explains that she likes “authentic partnerships more than traditional service learning” because notions of “who’s producing knowledge in whose interest, who’s getting credit for it, and who has the expertise” are challenged through the research process. However, even when deep levels of

reciprocity cannot be arranged, participants did express a desire for some exchange for their time, whether that is access to university resources, direct service, or training.

In discussions of mutual benefit and community-based research relationships the first questions to ask are: who does the university *say* benefits from CBR? Who *is* benefiting from CBR? And who *should* be benefitting from CBR? When reading over interview transcripts it is clear that students and faculty are the main beneficiaries of Clark's approach to CBR. Students gain research experience and produce papers for their courses, faculty publish their findings and gain respect within academia. Even university discourse around the value of community engagement (including research, service learning, and volunteerism) frames its worth in terms of the acquired skills, experience, and fostered civil engagement of students. When community benefit is mentioned it often comes with a paternalistic overtone where the community is the passive beneficiary of Clark and Clark student's benevolence.

The sharp contrast between community and university member benefit can be particularly severe in curriculum-based research. As one community partner explained to me in a conversation, when a professor hands over a class or a group of students to a community partner to manage while the students conduct research or a service-learning project, that professor is effectively passing the partial (or full) responsibility of teaching his/her students to the community partner. Are community-based organizations monetarily compensated for this work? The answer is almost unequivocally, no. Does managing groups of students require time and resources? Yes. Often the assumption is CBOs are benefitting from the labor and skills of students, which is what makes the exchange

reciprocal. However, as described previously, student skills and deliverables are not consistently high quality and thus do not mitigate the loss of staff time and resources. This is not to say all community-based organizations do not value student labor. Again, it is a matter of quality. For example, the CBO staff who attended the community engagement think tank were extremely grateful for the Clark work-study students their organizations receive. Work-study is a long-term commitment, typically 3-4 years. Students are compensated for their work by the university and CBOs receive free, reliable labor.

*The relevance and impact of research*

The community members interviewed explained that they only occasionally benefited from engaging in research and almost never did they perceive change as a result of their engagement. One community member conveys this message when she says, “I used to have a lot of time, now I’m a single mom working two jobs. I wouldn’t feel fatigued, though, if something was done with what I’m interviewed about.” Similarly, another participant explains, “there is no action component or inclusion of community members’ wants or needs” in the research process; “it is mostly theoretical community research...it is not grounded in what is realistic in [the community]”. One student spoke of discomfort with a similar dynamic she witnessed while conducting research:

**Student:** “yeah it is definitely an interesting relationship that I am happy to no longer be in soon. Ha, because it just doesn’t make sense.”

**Interviewer:** “The relationship of being...”

**Student:** “Between students needing to fulfill their own agendas and then organizations needing to do other things.”

The student had been a part of many research projects in various classes and grew to see dissonance between the needs of the community and the wants of the university. A faculty member poignantly expands on these issues:

“Actually I think people are really generous with their time in Main South but I think it is obnoxious of us to think that they should continue to do that without anything in return...no one wants to spill their soul unless they see some value in it...so I come from the belief that research should not just be about enhancing a knowledge base but that the act of engaging in research can be transformative for both communities engaged in the research. So I don’t necessarily see it as research *on* Main South as it is research *with* Main South.”

The professor’s final remark about conducting research *with* the community rather than *on* the community has particular resonance with many of the feelings expressed by community members. However, his warning to not take community members’ participation for granted has particular urgency since the implications of a disengaged community are so great.

#### *Limited access to participants*

There are a number of factors already mentioned that undermine a research project’s ability to be impactful, such as the short time frame of research, research that is only part of a curriculum designed to help students develop skills, and redundant, disorganized research. Another dynamic that occurs at Clark is that students, particularly ones who have a short amount of time to conduct research only access the flagship organizations and businesses in the area. Particularly at community organizations, this

means that staff become both the frequent subjects of research or the gatekeepers who must control researchers' access to their greater network of members. In fact, a couple of participants pointed out that there were actually a number of businesses and organizations that they thought were "hungry for collaboration."

Finding new ways to access more participants in the community is a necessary step to nurture sustainable community research. Some structural reasons for the limited population access may have to do with transportation. Other colleges in Worcester provide regular transport for students to their research and service sites.

### **Trust**

Elements of trust or distrust are invariably present in some of the examples and issues already discussed. However, since trust has been determined by researchers as important in facilitating access to research populations, particularly hard-to-reach and/or vulnerable groups, I would like to specifically address trust in relation to research fatigue.

Trust is a complex dynamic. Trust is built through experience and embedded in social action. Trust and risk also intertwine. For example, participants are more likely to engage in research when there is a lower risk that their time will be wasted. This perception of risk can be improved if the researcher has a positive track record with the participant or gatekeeper. Thus feelings of trust reduce the perception of risk and facilitate engagement. Distrust between researchers and community members is exacerbated by research fatigue but distrust can also be the result of the exploitative research that also produces fatigue. Trust can be nurtured or improved by researchers when they demonstrate empathy, credibility and reciprocity, establish rapport and attempt to equalize the

relationships of power that exist between participants and researchers (Rist, 1981; Emmel et al., 2007).

### *Distrust of students*

Trust or a lack thereof, was implicit in a number of accounts described by university and community members. From the interviews conducted, the community members with the greatest amount of distrust were staff from CBOs who act as gatekeepers, project partners or participants. The people they appeared to distrust the most were students. Both gatekeepers interviewed were adamant about their need to “protect residents from students.” One gatekeeper chooses to consistently participate in student research with the express hope that it will mean one less student is bothering a community resident with an interview. Another gatekeeper was similarly protective of the community members in her organization’s network:

**Gatekeeper:** “I don’t connect Clark students to [community members] too much.”

**Interviewer:** “It there a reason for that?”

**Gatekeeper:** “Um yeah, I feel like it just isn’t appropriate all the time, unless they are a long-standing intern. Yeah, I wouldn’t feel comfortable with a student contacting someone in our network...especially if it is an undergraduate wanting to interview the kids for a paper or something like that I wont feel comfortable, I am more protective of the kids feeling like test subjects or something like that.”

Part of the gatekeepers’ distrust can be accounted for by students’ poor research etiquette and an understandable motivation to protect residents from having their time wasted by unprepared students asking basic or ignorant questions. The last quote, however, signals a

deeper form of distrust. She uses the word “test subjects;” other community members used terms such as “lab rats” and “guinea pigs” and in doing so they allude to a type of research that produces extreme power asymmetries, particularly between the researcher and the researched. It illustrates research that extracts knowledge and experiences from the community with little offered in return.

One gatekeeper told a story of a woman in her network who was offended by a student’s conduct during an interview. Thus, the gatekeeper took it upon herself to prevent such interactions from occurring in the future which meant almost unilaterally barring students from residents. It is then little wonder that research fatigue persists in the community. Many gatekeepers prevent students from accessing their wider network of residents while many students only contact flagship institutions in the area because of convenience, a lack of other options, and semester-based time constraints. The pool of potential participants is actually quite small for such a population dense area.

These levels of distrust are alarming and certainly warrant immediate attention, however, teasing out the roots of the problem for the purpose of addressing the issue is more complex. First, it is important to note that students are not the only party responsible for a lack of trust between the community and the university. Even students should not be blamed for their poor behavior because the structure in which most students conduct community-based research is not conducive to building trust. Many faculty members are not preparing their students to navigate the unique complexities of community-based research. Preparation can be as simple as teaching basic research etiquette or as involved as

a professor building rapport and trust with an organization and developing the curriculum each semester around the needs of that organization.

### *Distrust of the university*

Further still, the roots of the distrust felt by some community members can also be found in the choices made by the university administration through the years. There have been a few development projects in the area initiated by the university in which residents and organizations were largely excluded from the planning process. Community members know that the university fancies itself as an engaged community partner but when breaks in the process occur and community members are ignored they cannot help but think the university is still ultimately self-interested. Several faculty and staff spoke about meeting resistance from community members as a result of these projects.

Finally, there is an underlying distrust that seems to take root from a certain cultural understanding at the university. There is a conception of the community as being a “living laboratory for our research and learning”, valued foremost as a space for training students (ClarkUniversity, 2012b). This propensity of Clark to use the surrounding community as a field for students to practice skills is certainly what community members were alluding to when they said they did not like participating in or supporting research that made themselves or others feel like “lab rats,” “guinea pigs,” and “test subjects”. In fact, many of the findings discussed reflect this cultural approach to community-based research. This in turn indicates that although there are simple process changes that could relieve the affects of research fatigue, if the university does not also address its



predominantly extractive cultural practices and conceptions then those changes will offer only limited relief, particularly in regards to trust.

## CONCLUSION

Community-based research (CBR) has the potential to be a revolutionary strategy for achieving lasting, fundamental change. Its ability to unite the three academic missions of teaching, research, and service has great implications for academic institutions and the communities that surround them. Simply calling research CBR, however, does not mean the process is revolutionary in nature. Because of the disorganized, inconsistent approach to community-based research at Clark University much of the research that occurs has little connection to the theories of CBR. Given the significant increase in community-based learning throughout institutions of higher education, there are probably many campuses like Clark University that believe they are engaged in community-based research but actually enact contradictory principles and practices. For this reason, CBR can actually be deceptive and more at risk of engendering research fatigue when it promises mutual benefit, collaboration, participatory methods, and social change but is unable to follow through.

Using Clayton et al's relationship evaluation framework, many of the examples outlined by participants indicate that the overall research relationship between the university and the community can be characterized as somewhere between exploitative and transactional. An exploitative relationship intentionally or unintentionally takes advantage of or harms one or both parties. One clear sign of exploitation comes from the examples

where Main South, the community surrounding Clark, is referred to as a laboratory and thus only instrumental in university-led, uni-directional knowledge production.

More subtle signs of an exploitative relationship are present in community members' descriptions of feeling like "lab rats," "guinea pigs," or "subjects" when they participate in research. By using these descriptors, participants imply that they feel like objects in research, objects that are only instrumental in university knowledge production. Another example comes from a participant who described Clark's community research as "drive-by" research, where researchers enter the community briefly to extract knowledge and are never heard from or seen again. This dynamic is found again when community members were asked how often they receive a final research product and each individual gave a percentage less than half. Furthermore, signs of exploitation exist in the way gatekeepers protect residents and resist research by not allowing researchers access to their wider networks of community residents.

A transactional relationship is meant to complete short-term tasks. Each party benefits from the exchange but the relationship is only seen as instrumental with no long-term scope. There are many isolated examples of transactional research at Clark. The campaign to expand use of the Clark OneCard and the marketing research project for a local business are such instances. Though the Clark OneCard campaign aimed to change policies at Clark University and there was a clear benefit for the businesses that participated, the relationship was short-term. Similarly, expanding the use of the Clark OneCard was the end goal as opposed to one goal in an ongoing initiative to strengthen the business relationship between Clark and local businesses. Every semester, local public

schools receive teaching assistants and aides from Clark's undergraduate and graduate education programs. This exchange has opened up isolated opportunities to develop research projects with teacher-driven objectives.

It is common for researchers to outline and promise mutual benefit to community members at the outset of their projects, particularly if the project developed from a community-based learning course. Some CBOs or businesses are able to see the benefit of the project come to fruition. Many community partners, however, do not. This occurs for various reasons, several of which are outlined in the findings. Community partners often do not receive the final research product; factors such as time and resource constraints limit the quality of the research; and there is the added cost of managing students. Once these dynamics play out, the reciprocity promised at the beginning of the transactional CBR relationship may not be possible.

## IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### **University attention to community research fatigue**

For an institution of higher education, there are countless reasons why community research fatigue is a phenomenon that should be reflected on, investigated, and protected against. To start, many universities and colleges have begun to rethink their institutional missions and implement an array of community outreach practices. The identification of several issues in the academy – higher education's disconnect from communities, an exceedingly limited definition of research, and the need to prepare students' for democratic citizenship – catalyzed this shift (Strand, et al., 2003). The existence of community research fatigue, however, is an indication that a university's relationship with its

surrounding community needs attention. For institutions of higher education that are in the natal stage of initiating community-based research, planning against community research fatigue at the outset will likely ensure fewer issues further down the line.

If community research fatigue is allowed to persist unabated there are a number of possible consequences. The most obvious result would be a reduction in willing research participants. For institutions that value communities foremost for their instrumental role in research, a declining amount of participants is alarming because it threatens institutional knowledge production. For the university that values the quality of its relationship with the surrounding community, persistent community research fatigue is even more troubling. Using this study's findings as a guide, the existence of community research fatigue might indicate research practices that exploit community members' time and knowledge and produce knowledge that is not relevant to or commensurate with community needs. Unabated research fatigue (which could also be a microcosm of a broader ailing relationship) might lead to tensions or out-right animosity between the university and community. Furthermore, a tense or hostile research environment degrades students' experiences with community-based research and might push students away from continued civil engagement. Ultimately, research fatigue and the dynamics that fuel it suggest an unsustainable way to produce knowledge and facilitate learning.

## **Recommendations**

Given the state of Clark's community research relationship, there are many areas to improve. To begin, I want go back to a few themes and issues mentioned that warrant further attention. From there I will discuss ways to improve community-based research and

alleviate community research fatigue at Clark University, or any institution of higher education dealing with similar issues.

### *CBR partnerships*

Academic literature is bursting with articles that sing the merits of partnerships in facilitating community-based research (CBR) projects (Israel, et al., 2006; Israel, et al., 1998; Israel, et al., 2008; Minkler, 2005; Stoecker, 2003; Strand, et al., 2003; Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003b). In fact, some authors speak of partnerships as necessary, foundational structures for CBR; so much that if there is not a partnership, you probably are not conducting community-based research (Israel, et al., 1998; Stoecker, 2003; Strand, et al., 2003). This is because one of CBR's central features is collaboration and according to Strand et al. (2003b) "the foundation for that collaboration is the campus-community partnership" (p.16).

Within the realm of campus-community engagement, the terms "relationship" and "partnership" are often used interchangeably (Clayton, et al., 2010). However, Clayton and her collaborators hold that although "relationship" can be used to describe a wide range of interactions, the term "partnership" denotes a particular sub-set of relationships that are characterized by qualities of "closeness, equity, and integrity" (Clayton, et al., 2010, p. 5). Literature about CBR delineates partnerships in a similar way. Successful partnerships exist when partners share a long-term social change perspective, agree about goals and strategies, have mutual trust and respect, and share power and resources (Strand et al., 2003b). In short, partnerships become the scaffolding that supports meaningful community-based research. They are also the necessary structure from which to address

power inequalities between resource-rich, knowledge-dominant universities and the often underserved disenfranchised communities adjacent to them.

At Clark University many informal partnerships exist between faculty and community-based organizations (CBOs) where, at the very least, closeness and trust have been nurtured. Thus, these are the logical platforms from which to develop long-term formal partnerships. It is not fair, however, to leave the burden of developing and sustaining partnerships to faculty members alone, particularly if university-wide process problems, such as coordination of research projects, are not being addressed. Lack of buy-in and dedication of necessary resources from the administration have been cited repeatedly as barriers to developing thriving partnerships and relevant community-engaged scholarship (Bloomgarden, Bombardier, Breitbart, Nagel, & Smith, 2006; Israel, et al., 2006; Israel, et al., 1998; Minkler, 2005; Reardon, 1998; Saltmarsh, et al., 2009; Strand, et al., 2003, 2003b; Tomlinson, et al., 2006).

### *Principles of practice*

Partnerships are the ideal structural support for community-based research activities. The set of values and principles developed in a given partnership, however, does not necessarily govern community-engaged scholarship throughout a university. Yet there is often a need for well-defined goals and values at the outset of community research or engagement relationships, no matter how big or small, simple or complex the relationship may be. Other colleges and universities, such as the Five Colleges Consortium, have addressed this need by developing a set of principles and guidelines that govern campus-community engagement using a participatory process (HolyokeC3). The codified

document helps to ensure stakeholders come together with the same understanding of the values and goals that guide all campus-community relationships, not just those generated through specific partnerships. Furthermore, the very process of developing principles could be used as an opportunity to strengthen relationships, engage a broader network of stakeholders, nurture ownership of the community engagement process and plan for the future.

### *Academic culture*

Although there are some simple changes that could be enacted to relieve feelings of research fatigue among community members, the dynamics of research fatigue ultimately point to problems in the university's institutional culture. Institutional culture is "the deeply embedded patterns of organizational behavior and the shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies that members have about their organization or its work" (Peterson & Spencer, 1991). For any and all community work to be productive and thrive, it needs an academic culture that embraces the values of collaboration and reciprocity (Weerts, 2005). Saltmarsh et al. (2009) implore universities to engender a democratic academic culture where the norms are "determined by the values of inclusiveness, participation, task sharing, lay participation, reciprocity in public problem solving, and an equality of respect for the knowledge and experience that everyone contributes to education and community building" (p. 6).

At Clark University there are conflicting cultural scripts around community engagement and research. From one side there is the previously discussed perspective that the community is a practice ground for students to learn new skills and build resumes.

Then there is rhetoric from Clark's new Liberal Education and Effective Practice curriculum which aims to increase "*Personal and Social Responsibility* [in students]-including ethical reasoning and action...civic knowledge and engagement locally as well as globally...taking particular advantage of Clark's urban location" (Clark University, 2012a). Fortunately and unfortunately, the language of LEEP is broad and could lead to varied manifestations. The two main variations are approaches to engagement that either maintain the status quo or transform it. With LEEP still working out its kinks and integrating on campus, there is time to use LEEP's resources and mission to build truly collaborative CBR partnerships where all partners share power, set a relevant research agenda, and ultimately transform the community and the university.

### *Planning for impact*

It is clear from this case study that there are nuanced, interconnected factors and issues at play in community research fatigue. To conclude and summarize this discussion, though, I want to go back to that first conversation with June in which she indicated endless research where "nothing has ever changed"—the idea of *impact* which spurred this entire investigation. If every stakeholder in community-based research – administrators, students, faculty, and community members – made positive community impact the central goal of their CBR endeavors many of the issues discussed in this paper would improve. Successful planning for impactful research requires many different considerations; some that will address individual behavior problems such as unprepared students and others that address university-wide process problems.



To conduct impactful CBR and consequently protect against community research fatigue:

- Relevant university and community members need to develop a long-term perspective and plan (Strand, et al., 2003; Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003b).
- University members, particularly faculty who teach community-based learning courses, should focus on developing long-term partnerships with CBOs. That way, even if groups of students change each semester, a current class' work will build on previous groups.
- CBOs and community residents must have input, or control of, all or part of the research process. Points of control are: “defining the research questions, designing the research, implementing the research design, analyzing the research data, reporting the research results, and acting on the research results” (Stoecker, 1999).
- Stakeholders of CBR need a way to better conceptualize impact. DeMeulenaere & Cann (2013) developed a framework for understanding and planning for impact that analyzes three dimensions: ideological impact, material impact, and the scale of the impact.
- After conceptualizing impact, stakeholders, at the outset of a research project, must develop clear plans to turn research into social action (Stoecker, 1999, 2007). For this reason, Stoecker (2007) argues that CBR initiatives should be linked to community organizing campaigns.
- Given the implications of community research fatigue, the administration must support and dedicate necessary resources to develop thriving partnerships and transformative community-engaged scholarship (Bloomgarden, Bombardier, Breitbart, Nagel, & Smith, 2006; Israel, et al., 2006; Israel, et al., 1998; Minkler, 2005; Reardon, 1998; Saltmarsh, et al., 2009; Strand, et al., 2003, 2003b).
- Finally, these recommendations are not meant to inspire solutions that bog down faculty, students, staff, and community members with multiple hoops to jump through. Rather, the goal should be to develop a thoughtful democratic foundation

with an efficient infrastructure in such a way that researchers cannot help but conduct relevant, impactful non-fatiguing research.

All the above recommendations grew from the research findings and reflect a much-needed shift in academic culture from an extractive understanding of the community to one where community residents and community-based organizations (CBO) are treated as equal partners in the knowledge production process. If we embrace these changes in our approach to CBR, we will begin to avoid the hazards of this important form of research and witness its deep potential.

## APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol

### Interview Questions for Clark University Faculty and Staff Members

- In what capacity have you been involved in researching the Main South community? (provide examples)
- Why do you conduct research?
- What do you tend to research about?
- Have you come across community members who have expressed feelings of research fatigue? What do they express to you in this regard?
- Have you experienced research fatigue?
- Have you noticed research fatigue in others?
- What is the nature of the fatigue?
- In your opinion, what factors cause research fatigue?
- In your opinion, what factors make research fatigue worse?
- Do you have any ideas on how to address research fatigue specifically faced by community members in Main South?
- Are there any questions you expected us to ask but we did not?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add?
- Can you provide our research group with names of other individuals at Clark who would be interested in contributing to this research?
- Can you provide our research group with names of other individuals in the community who would be interested in contributing to this research?

### Interview Questions for Community Members

- Roughly, how many times have you been surveyed or interviewed by a researcher from Clark in the last 5 years?
- -Why do you participate in research?
- -What do you tend to be interviewed about?
- In the research you have participated in, have you ever been given the final research product or paper?
- Have you seen any change result from the research you have participated in?
- -What do you like about participating in research?
- -What do you dislike about participating in research?
- -Roughly, how often have you been asked similar questions or participated in research addressing similar problems?
- Have you experienced research fatigue as a result of these Clark studies? (be prepared to explain, jargony term)
- Have you heard of other community members mention being exhausted, drained, or annoyed by community research conducted by Clark?
- What have they expressed?

- Do you have any ideas on how Clark can address research fatigue? What do you suggest?
- Are there any questions you expected us to ask but we did not?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add?
- Can you provide us with names of others in the community who would be interested in contributing to this research?
- Can you provide us with names of others at Clark who would be interested in contributing to this research?

## APPENDIX B: IRB Approval

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